



SHAFTESBURY
COMMUNITY RECREATION CENTRE



Mr John Walsh

CEO Belfast City Council,

23rd July 2026

Dear Mr Walsh

Firstly, we hope you are keeping well and we wish to thank Belfast City Council for the ongoing relationship in place with the Independent Centres at,

-  Grosvenor Community Centre
-  Shaftesbury Healthy Living Centre
-  Sally Gardens
-  Hanwood

We wish to thank you Chief Executive, the senior team and departmental senior officers, as well as councillors for recognising the value of the centres and the historic issues related to lack of inflationary increases applied to the independent facilities.

As you know, the ask had been “for an **in-year** increase to the running cost grant support provided. As well as **urgent** actions to enable reasonable recurring support from 2026/2027 and thereafter, which is cognisant of the unique context and scale of the 4 independent centres”.

Further to this, there was council agreement for a review of the models and agreements across the independent centres and condition surveys of facilities.

We recognise that officers have a large portfolio of work this year, particularly with Fleadh Cheoil, leisure transformation, the community support plan and delivering the aspirations of the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy.

As such, we fully accept that the independent centres reviews are unlikely to be completed in financial year 2026/2027.

For that reason, we would ask that the initial request for increase in 2025/2026 is applied again and in year to the support for 2026/2027, until a final appropriate rate is agreed linked to review completion.

Further, we would ask that this increase is considered in light of any in year departmental underspends, if appropriate.

We are happy to forward supporting reports, media, OBA data, numerical information and programming overviews across the sites if required.



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By way of background again, the centres represent thriving hubs of **community development, good relations work, community sports, safety, health and wellbeing**. The facilities are large in scale, have secured excellent cultural inclusion at Belfast City Council owned premises and consistently demonstrate some of the highest participation rates across the existing BCC Leisure estate. The independent centres encompass former full size leisure centre facilities (all dry), with high operational, 'open door' costs versus smaller community centre settings. The facilities have **measurable, evidenced high footfall numbers** and have come to represent quality examples of community asset transfer. Including being cited as 'models of good practice' in the DTNI community asset transfer report commissioned by Belfast City Council in 2014. The centres have been beacons of cultural inclusion including during **high tension periods, including in 2026**.

The facilities have represented a **cost saving to Belfast City Council** and the bespoke models of management have ensured that centres, which were at risk of participation decline, have thrived in usage and impact terms. The organisations each have unique selling points, from 7 day opening, central arenas for cultural inclusion, OBA Health programming and advancers of community sports.

The centres have, **to date, not been included in leisure transformation schemes** and as such face historic infrastructure issues linked to insulation and outdated heating systems. It is hoped that the centres may be included in Leisure Transformation future initiatives. In the interim, officers have instructed condition reports be undertaken which are very welcome.

To conclude, we ask that the same support agreed in 2025/2026 is applied in 2026/2027 (in year), to recognise the scale of operations across the 4 sites. Further that this request is considered as part of in year underspends. Once again, we sincerely thank Belfast City Council for the partnership and vision in community asset transfer. We believe this vision has been borne out in the 4 independent facilities becoming successful examples of community and council working together.

Thank you again sincerely for all the help, support, guidance and faith in our organisations.

Yours sincerely

Maura Millen

Chairperson